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AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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SUBJECT: Initial thoughts on new Greek CHOD Giagkos

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CLASSIFIED BY: Tom Miller, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, STATE,  
EXEC; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. The August 6 replacement of Greek CHOD General Dimitris Grapsas with Chief of the Air Force General Ioannis Giagkos (YAH gos) set off a round of speculation in the press, but appears consistent with general personnel practices. Further, Giagkos at first glance appears to be more politically astute than his predecessor, with a reputation of integrity and cool-headed thinking. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S/NF) On August 6, the MOD announced the retirement of Chief of Defense General Dimitris Grapsas, following an unscheduled meeting of the Government Council of Foreign Affairs and Defense (KYSEA). The new CHOD is the former Air Force Chief, Lieutenant General Ioannis Giagkos, who will pin on his fourth star for this assignment. According to Athens DAO reporting, General Giagkos is a highly respected "operational" airman who has a reputation of impeccable integrity and cool-headed clear thinking.

¶3. (C) Most media reported that the change of leadership was due to the fact that the Greek government wished to work better with new NATO SYG Rasmussen and new leaders in the Turkish armed forces. Grapsas' more hard-line position on Turkey and Cyprus issues also often put him at odds with the Greek MFA. MOD Meimarakis, however, denied any rifts with the outgoing CHOD, and invited him to remain his "unofficial advisor" on national defense issues. While the KYSEA's move appeared to be unplanned, it is worth noting that Grapsas assumed command in August 2007, and two years is the normal full-length of time for a Greek CHOD to serve. Giagkos' selection also keeps with the Greek tradition of rotating service chiefs through the CHOD position.

¶4. (C) Giagkos is publicly perceived as a military professional who has both the experience of Greek-Turkish tensions in the Aegean skies, as well as the political sense to perceive the bigger picture beyond it. Greek Air Force officers are generally viewed as more friendly to the U.S. than in other services by reason of education, training, and common weapons systems, i.e. Greek reliance on the A-7, F-4, and F-16. MOD sources suggest that General Giagkos is not an exception to this, and that the new CHOD will bring fresh thinking to tackling Greek-Turkish differences, as well as engage more than his predecessor in the practice of military diplomacy.

15. (C) We view Giagkos as positively oriented toward the U.S., though an ardent defender of Greek national interests. Under his leadership, the Hellenic Air Force for the first time sent members of its premier F-16 squadron to participate in the USAF's premier exercise, Red Flag, in fall 2008. Giagkos has attended numerous U.S. military schools, and was one of the first Greek F-16 pilots to receive U.S. training. He also sought to improve USAF and HAF relations and cooperation by establishing an exchange program, whereby two U.S. pilots and two Greek pilots would live and work in the others' nations and fly with their respective squadrons.

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